

Remarks of Henry A. Waxman
Lifetime Advocate for Justice Award
June 13, 2014

Thank you to Hector Villagra for presenting me with ACLU's Lifetime Advocate for Justice Award.

I am extremely proud of the ACLU's work, so it is a tremendous honor for me to receive this award. No organization has worked harder or longer on more fronts to protect our personal liberties than the ACLU.

I can tell you from my own experience that you want the ACLU next to you in the trenches -- fighting to protect a woman's right to choose, every worker's right to organize, everyone's right to vote, to love and marry who we want, to speak without fear of censorship, and to worship, or not, how we please.

While we've made progress in forming a more perfect union, we can never take the gains we've made for granted.

When the ACLU was first formed nearly a century ago, it championed the rights of individuals persecuted for their political beliefs. Since that time, it has championed the rights of all Americans to live free from injustice and discrimination.

When I held the first ever congressional hearings on a mysterious new illness that would become known as HIV/AIDS, the ACLU worked with me to protect the gay community from appalling discrimination -- so appalling that we were fighting fear mongers in Congress who wanted to quarantine AIDS victims on a remote island in the South Pacific.

We will always need the ACLU because ignorance and fear drive reason and common sense away -- and because purveyors of deception and disinformation must be confronted.

A report I released during the George W. Bush Administration identified more than 20 areas -- from oil and gas exploration to abortion services to stem cell research -- where the Administration manipulated the scientific process and distorted or suppressed scientific findings. Today, virtually the entire Republican Party denies the clear science behind climate change.

We will always need the ACLU because we must prevent the misuse of scientific advancements to infringe on personal freedom.

We are living during an exciting time when new innovations and technologies are changing our lives. But technology is also outpacing laws that protect our individual privacy and save us from unwarranted government intrusion. Constitutional rights and national security are not either-or propositions. They can co-exist, and we must not succumb to fear.

Finally, we must preserve net neutrality so the Internet can continue to flourish as an open platform for ideas. Net neutrality promotes citizen engagement and ultimately strengthens our democracy. I will be working in Congress to protect net neutrality until the day I leave office.

I thank you for your support over the years and for this evening's award. I will not have the privilege of serving as your Congressman again, but I look forward to working with you, as a friend, on the issues we care about.